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Dear Janet

We would like to raise awareness among the membership of the BVCS about a VLA-funded project planned for 2009.

Proposed opportunistic survey of VTEC O157 infection in camelids

Verocytotoxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) O157 has become an important human pathogen during the last 25 years. It causes a broad spectrum of human illness including diarrhoea, haemorrhagic colitis and severe systemic complications, particularly haemolytic uraemic syndrome and can be fatal especially in young children and the elderly. Most cases are sporadic and unattributable although case-control studies have indicated that animal contact is a major risk factor. In Britain, the large VTEC O157 outbreaks have invariably been acquired indirectly from animals (especially cattle) via contaminated food or water but the potential for large outbreaks to also occur from direct contact with a wide range of animal species has been demonstrated in the USA, Canada and elsewhere. VTEC O157 is a commensal organism found in the alimentary tract of livestock and this *E. coli* serogroup is not associated with animal disease.

The prevalence of VTEC O157 in farmed livestock has been extensively researched, including comprehensive abattoir surveys but relatively little is known about VTEC O157 in the diverse range of other species such as those found on premises open to the public. Since the 1990s, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) has assisted public health authorities in England and Wales with the investigation of human VTEC O157 infection linked to these amenity premises. Although only sampled on three premises a high prevalence of infection was detected in camelids (Pritchard and others, in press *Veterinary Record*). There does not appear to be any other available information on VTEC O157 in camelids and we therefore wish to follow up this aspect with further studies.

During 2009 we plan to perform cultures for VTEC O157 on faecal samples from camelids submitted to Regional Laboratories for routine diagnostic or screening purposes and collect ancillary information for analysis, such as husbandry practices and the presence of other species on the premises.



Normally cultures for VTEC O157 are only performed by VLA where there are perceived human health risks or as part of a survey. There will be no extra charge for this examination. The samples will be stored and batched for testing to reduce costs and individual results will not be reported. General advice on the measures to protect human health from VTEC O157 is given on the enclosed leaflet. Individual results will be confidential and there are no statutory legal implications if we detect infection. The information gained from this survey will help to inform advice given to camelid livestock owners about the risk of exposure to this important zoonotic condition. Camelid owners who do not wish to participate can ask the submitting practice to tick the opt-out box on the VLA submission (supplementary) form at the bottom of page 2.

For more information contact the authors or consult the following websites:

[HPA VTEC information](#)

[Defra VTEC profile pdf](#)

[Defra Zoonoses disease reports](#)



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